

Module 5

Pandemic Flu and the Workplace

In this module, we will discuss:

- Business continuity planning
- Employees' health and safety
- Business Operations
- Society
- Employee involvement

In Modules 2 and 3, you learned how *you* as an individual can prepare for a flu pandemic. In Module 4, you learned what actions local, state and federal governments are taking to reduce a flu pandemic's impact on health care. In addition, public and private sector organizations should prepare for a flu pandemic, especially for anticipated absenteeism and changes in demand for their products and services.



Just as there will be an increase in demand for some services, such as health care, there will also be a decrease in demand for others. For example, during the global SARS outbreak in 2003, air travel, tourism and retail industries throughout Asia and later Toronto, Canada, experienced a tremendous decrease. How will the demand for *your* products or services change during a flu pandemic and how will you prepare for that change?

Business Continuity Planning

Staff absenteeism, higher or lower demand for products and services, an inability to deliver products and services, and even a lack of funding from global economic disruption could affect the functioning of organizations. That's why *all* workplaces need to prepare.

By developing continuity plans *now*, businesses can help reduce the *economic* impact of a pandemic.



Pandemic Influenza Awareness Program

This program is made possible by the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness and the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.



In this module, we use the terms *business*, *organization* and *workplace* interchangeably. This includes all agencies, organizations and companies in both public and private sectors. Recommendations provided apply to all workplaces.

Most large public and private sector organizations have formal business continuity plans in place to ensure that they will survive and thrive during a disruption, such as a snowstorm or hurricane. However, most of these plans are for short term events and do not address what to do in a communicable disease emergency such as a flu pandemic. Also, since a flu pandemic will last a long time, organizations need plans that enable them to continue their most important functions for a period of two to three months, with fewer staff available. They should also remember that these two or three month periods may occur a few times over 18 to 24 months.

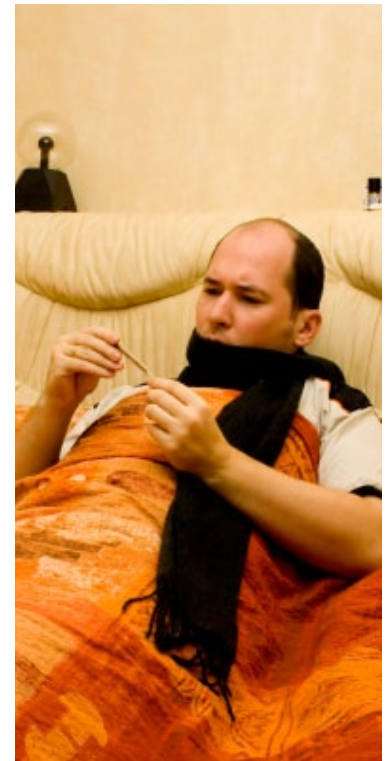
While preparing for this may seem overwhelming to smaller businesses, continuity plans are critical for them as well. Specific planning checklists are available for state and local governments, workplaces, schools, health care entities and community organizations. There are resources at the end of this module that can guide you to help your organization survive a flu pandemic.

Read the *Business Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist* resource found at the end of this module.

The next few sections highlight some of the main points from this checklist that could affect *all* employees.



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Employees' Health and Safety

Employers need to have policies that will help reduce the spread of influenza in the workplace. They may start by educating you and encouraging healthy habits *today* to avoid illness and absenteeism caused by common illnesses such as the seasonal flu. This includes promoting the techniques discussed in Module 3, such as frequent handwashing, covering coughs and sneezes, and cleaning and disinfecting surfaces that are frequently touched by many people.



Employers need to have policies that will help reduce the spread of influenza in the workplace.

Despite these efforts to reduce the spread of the pandemic flu virus, absenteeism may still be high. You need to feel protected enough to report to work if you are well. To ensure a safe and productive work environment during a flu pandemic, your employer may have policies that are different from those you have now.



For example:

- You may be sent home if you show symptoms of pandemic flu, as long as the policy complies with laws that prohibit discrimination in the workplace.
- You may be required to stay home if you or a household member is sick with the flu.
- You may be told to limit handshaking and face-to-face meetings.
- Your lunchroom and common areas may be closed.
- Workspaces may be arranged so employees are at least 6 feet apart.
- You may be asked to work different hours (so fewer employees are working together at any given time) or to work from home when possible.

Policies and plans should be communicated clearly and effectively to all employees.

QUIZ 1

All of these are methods to protect employees' health and safety, EXCEPT:

- ☐ A: Reduce the number of face-to-face meetings that are held in the workplace
- ☐ B: Arrange workspaces so employees are at least 6 feet apart
- ☐ C: Allow flexible work hours (so fewer people are working together at any given time)
- ☐ D: Have all sick people working together in one section of the room

Answers are at the end of this module.

Business Operations

During a pandemic, will there be increased or decreased demand for your company's products and services? Has your employer developed and planned for scenarios that might happen in a pandemic? Has your employer identified which functions are critical for maintaining operations, then cross-trained staff to be able to carry out these functions?

Even the best preparations to keep employees healthy and critical functions operating will fail if your business can't receive the goods and services needed from suppliers *or* if customers aren't placing orders. Your employer should ask suppliers *and* customers if they have flu pandemic plans to ensure that your organization can continue relying on them to provide or receive goods and services. Remember, your company depends on others in order to stay in business.



Even the best preparations will fail if your business can't receive the goods and services needed from suppliers *or* if customers aren't placing orders.

Society

Your business plays a role within the community and our society; it also depends on a functioning society to stay profitable. How does your organization fit into your community's pandemic flu plan? How would the community and other workplaces be affected if your business closed or couldn't fully operate because of a pandemic? Your company's continuity plan will help you plan and communicate with other sectors of society that depend on your goods or services.

The *Workplace Planning* webpage listed at the end of this module provides answers to issues that are important for business continuity.



QUIZ 2

Your company will recover quickly from a flu pandemic as long as a good business continuity plan is in place.

☐ True ☐ False

Answers are at the end of this module.



Employee Involvement



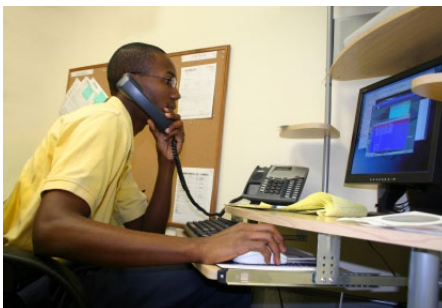
What if you can't come to work because public transportation isn't available?

The most effective way to ensure that a business continuity plan succeeds during a flu pandemic is to ensure that both employers and employees are involved in workplace planning.

A website is listed at the end of this module that can help with workplace planning. It addresses specific questions and contains information on benefits, safety and health, unemployment and financial assistance. Here are some important questions for employers and employees to consider:

- What if you can't come to work because public transportation isn't available?
- How will you be protected from the flu at work?
 - What social distancing policies will be put in place?
 - Will personal protective equipment (such as facemasks and gloves) be required and provided?
- If you start showing symptoms of the flu at work, will you be sent home?
- What happens to your job if you or a family member catches pandemic flu? How long can you stay home? Will you get paid? Will you keep your job?
- What is the "return to work" policy after you've been out sick or out caring for a loved one who was sick? How do you know you're not contagious? Will you need a doctor's note to return to work?

As your employer is developing a business continuity plan, be sure you stay informed and provide input about the issues that may affect you.



Personal Responsibility

As an employee, your responsibility at the workplace begins at home. While your employer is developing a business continuity plan, make sure you've completed your *Pandemic Flu Personal Emergency Plan* as well (as was explained in Module 2). The issues that may affect you at the workplace are important, but you may not even be able to consider going to work if you have not made arrangements at home. Be sure to develop your family care plan, stockpile necessities such as food, water and medications, gather medical information, and identify your emergency contacts.



The issues that may affect you at the workplace are important, but you may not even be able to consider going to work if you have not made arrangements at home.

As you've learned, all workplaces have a responsibility to help reduce the spread of disease and lessen impacts on society. The stress that a flu pandemic will place on health care, the economy and society may be overwhelming. In Module 6, you'll learn about coping with the emotional challenges of a flu pandemic.

Let's Review!

- Organizations need plans that help them continue their most important functions for a period of 2 to 3 months.
- During a flu pandemic, your employer may have policies that are different from those you have now.
- Know what role your business plays within the community and society.
- As an employee, it's important to be involved with pandemic flu planning at work.

RESOURCES FOR MODULE 5

- *Workplace Planning*, a webpage at www.pandemicflu.gov, managed by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/workplaceplanning/index.html

Other resources on this site include:

- *Planning Checklists for Employers* (shown at the end of this module)
www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/checklists.html
- *Workplace Questions for Employees*
www.pandemicflu.gov/faq/workplace_questions/index.html
- www.pandemicflu.gov
- www.njflupandemic.gov

Be sure to check these websites for updated information.

See you in Module 6!

MODULE 5 ANSWERS

QUIZ 1: D – PUT SICK PEOPLE TOGETHER

Anyone who is sick should always stay home from work until they are no longer contagious.

QUIZ 2: FALSE

Having the very best business continuity plan does not guarantee that your company will immediately recover from a flu pandemic. You depend on others to stay in business and they must have continuity plans as well. Every organization that you buy from and sell to must take responsibility.

BUSINESS PANDEMIC INFLUENZA PLANNING CHECKLIST



In the event of pandemic influenza, businesses will play a key role in protecting employees' health and safety as well as limiting the negative impact to the economy and society. Planning for pandemic influenza is critical. To assist you in your efforts, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have developed the following checklist for large businesses. It identifies important, specific activities large businesses can do now to prepare, many of which will also help you in other emergencies. Further information can be found at www.pandemicflu.gov and www.cdc.gov/business.

1.1 Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your business:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify a pandemic coordinator and/or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning. The planning process should include input from labor representatives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify essential employees and other critical inputs (e.g. raw materials, suppliers, sub-contractor services/products, and logistics) required to maintain business operations by location and function during a pandemic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Train and prepare ancillary workforce (e.g. contractors, employees in other job titles/descriptions, retirees).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and plan for scenarios likely to result in an increase or decrease in demand for your products and/or services during a pandemic (e.g. effect of restriction on mass gatherings, need for hygiene supplies).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine potential impact of a pandemic on company business financials using multiple possible scenarios that affect different product lines and/or production sites.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine potential impact of a pandemic on business-related domestic and international travel (e.g. quarantines, border closures).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Find up-to-date, reliable pandemic information from community public health, emergency management, and other sources and make sustainable links.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish an emergency communications plan and revise periodically. This plan includes identification of key contacts (with back-ups), chain of communications (including suppliers and customers), and processes for tracking and communicating business and employee status.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Implement an exercise/drill to test your plan, and revise periodically.

1.2 Plan for the impact of a pandemic on your employees and customers:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Forecast and allow for employee absences during a pandemic due to factors such as personal illness, family member illness, community containment measures and quarantines, school and/or business closures, and public transportation closures.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Implement guidelines to modify the frequency and type of face-to-face contact (e.g. hand-shaking, seating in meetings, office layout, shared workstations) among employees and between employees and customers (refer to CDC recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage and track annual influenza vaccination for employees.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate employee access to and availability of healthcare services during a pandemic, and improve services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate employee access to and availability of mental health and social services during a pandemic, including corporate, community, and faith-based resources, and improve services as needed.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify employees and key customers with special needs, and incorporate the requirements of such persons into your preparedness plan.

1.3 Establish policies to be implemented during a pandemic:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for employee compensation and sick-leave absences unique to a pandemic (e.g. non-punitive, liberal leave), including policies on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work after illness.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g. telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for preventing influenza spread at the worksite (e.g. promoting respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette, and prompt exclusion of people with influenza symptoms).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for employees who have been exposed to pandemic influenza, are suspected to be ill, or become ill at the worksite (e.g. infection control response, immediate mandatory sick leave).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Establish policies for restricting travel to affected geographic areas (consider both domestic and international sites), evacuating employees working in or near an affected area when an outbreak begins, and guidance for employees returning from affected areas (refer to CDC travel recommendations).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the company's response plan, altering business operations (e.g. shutting down operations in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees.

1.4 Allocate resources to protect your employees and customers during a pandemic:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide sufficient and accessible infection control supplies (e.g. hand-hygiene products, tissues and receptacles for their disposal) in all business locations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhance communications and information technology infrastructures as needed to support employee telecommuting and remote customer access.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure availability of medical consultation and advice for emergency response.

1.5 Communicate to and educate your employees:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop and disseminate programs and materials covering pandemic fundamentals (e.g. signs and symptoms of influenza, modes of transmission), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette, contingency plans).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Anticipate employee fear and anxiety, rumors and misinformation and plan communications accordingly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure that communications are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disseminate information to employees about your pandemic preparedness and response plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide information for the at-home care of ill employees and family members.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop platforms (e.g. hotlines, dedicated websites) for communicating pandemic status and actions to employees, vendors, suppliers, and customers inside and outside the worksite in a consistent and timely way, including redundancies in the emergency contact system.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Identify community sources for timely and accurate pandemic information (domestic and international) and resources for obtaining counter-measures (e.g. vaccines and antivirals).

1.6 Coordinate with external organizations and help your community:

Completed	In Progress	Not Started	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with insurers, health plans, and major local healthcare facilities to share your pandemic plans and understand their capabilities and plans.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborate with federal, state, and local public health agencies and/or emergency responders to participate in their planning processes, share your pandemic plans, and understand their capabilities and plans.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Communicate with local and/or state public health agencies and/or emergency responders about the assets and/or services your business could contribute to the community.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Share best practices with other businesses in your communities, chambers of commerce, and associations to improve community response efforts.